



(U) Working as a Policy Analyst: One Person's Perspective

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(S) When you walk through the door of a SIGINT policy staff office, what kind of people do you expect to see? You won't find Dilbert! Instead, you'll find a microcosm of the SIGINT system. Picture a mix of civilian and military employees, people from a variety of SIGINT disciplines, a myriad of targets, individuals with field experience, folks with a knowledge of cryptanalysis, those with experience in military support, ELINT, etc.

(S) Imagine people with different personality traits and work styles (introverts, extroverts, visionaries, implementers, risk-takers etc.) Starting to sound pretty diverse, doesn't it? Well, this town is big enough for all of them. In fact, it needs to be--policy regulates all aspects of NSA/CSS operations and the SIGINT system is so big that one person can't possibly answer all the questions!

(C) What is a typical day like for a policy "wonk"? People in the workforce come to us for authoritative answers on a multitude of topics. Some are time-sensitive or "short-fused" in nature. Whether they are e-mailing from the 3rd floor or calling from the field, they usually have already exhausted all other avenues and the buck stops with us. In an ideal world, the "issue du jour" can be categorized and handled by the policy officer with the most expertise in that area. However, even if it is familiar terrain, new twists can present themselves. Usually we conduct detailed research, starting with preliminary searches to see if there are existing policies, directives, or precedents from the Director of Central Intelligence on down that may provide a solution. Why re-invent the wheel if a sound process is already in place?

(C) In this age of transformation, policy offices face increasing challenges: we are called upon to approve or get management approval for precedent-setting initiatives, some with a level of risk to them. We don't always have the benefit of consulting existing directives, since the speed of business often outpaces written policy. In the absence of a formal roadmap, we rely on a toolbox of business practices and methodologies to keep the SIGINT system honest. We often:

- brainstorm with coworkers to find possibilities or solutions that aren't already apparent
- outline risks and benefits
- consult all organizations that might be affected a policy decision (equity owners)
- learn who the decision-making authorities are on particular issues, and
- decide when to elevate an issue to the decision-maker

We have to make sure that NSA can account for and defend all policy decisions (in court, if necessary) and ensure that all processes can be repeated and extended across the Enterprise (no cottage industries).



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(C) Policy work is challenging, but it is one of the best professional development opportunities around. It gives exposure to NSA's authorities, allows one to touch many SIGINT missions on a daily basis, to work with the best and brightest SIGINT professionals throughout the agency and in the field, and to stretch one's critical thinking abilities beyond imaginable limits. Whether you go on to become a manager or a senior technician, policy experience will serve as your conscience as you make future mission decisions.

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